

HIS INDWELLING PRESENCE

Intimate Studies in the Things of the Spirit

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CHAPTER SEVEN

OUR RESPONSE TO HIS INDWELLING

“Work out your own salvation . . . it is God which worketh in you” (Philippians 2:12, 13).

This chapter might be entitled: “Modern Pictures of Christian Living.” Having examined in the foregoing the principal scriptures dealing with the Holy Spirit, in His relationship to us and our relationship to Him, our present purpose is to bring these lessons to bear, in the most practical manner possible, upon the living of the Christian life by us moderns. Realizing also that ours is a day of overmuch materialism that militates against any sense of reality in things spiritual and supernatural, we desire to draw these pictures in the vivid colorings of the reader’s every-day life.

The aim throughout our studies has been to disclose the mutuality of the Spirit-indwelt life. He has His part in the program of the spiritual life—the things He does, desires to do, will assuredly do, if given full freedom and cooperation to that end. We have our part in the same program—the things that rest upon us, responsibility for which we cannot shift to another, in the doing of which, we accord Him His desired freedom for the carrying out of His part. It is a partnership life. He assuredly will not fail in His share of the partnership; we must make sure that we do not come short in ours. He will play fair with us; we must play fair with Him. We submit that the simple explanation that covers every failure in the Christian life is this: unfaithfulness to the partnership which was set up when we became the sons of God.

The possibilities of presenting truth by the picture method were demonstrated once for all and in the highest degree by our Lord Jesus Christ. His parables are word-pictures of which we never tire. Whenever, for example, we turn to the Parable of the Sower we see again the whole scene enacted before our eyes and the imagination, thus called into action, quickens the mind into some new apprehension of its scintillating truths. The fact is that Jesus resorted to the parable largely because His hearers could not at the time receive the truths He had to teach them; so He stored them away in the picture, in deep, rich suggestiveness, that the Spirit might illuminate them with understanding in His own good time and way.

Every true picture does us a service, by way of enriching the furnishings of the mind, of which the abstract statement is utterly incapable. For instance, transporting the reader to the writer’s former Seattle home, on the shores of Lake Washington, with the constant vista of Mt. Rainier’s perennial snows, I make the statement: “The mountain lies beyond the waters of the lake.”

Having heard the bare statement you have at once all there is for you in it. There is no hidden richness, nothing to grow upon you or respond to your efforts to appreciate it better. If, however, I can paint you a picture of the glories of that majestic mountain, snow-crowned, sun-kissed, cloud-enshrouded at times, set off by the shoreline beauties of the lake nestling at its foot, whose waters reflect the sky's deep azure and send forth a sparkle with each tossing wave—if I can succeed in making that scene live before your eyes, not only will you never forget it, but you can call it up and feed upon it afresh whensoever you will. And, thinking now of the parable, a shift of circumstances or a fresh hunger of the heart, five, ten, twenty years hence, may make the picture a hundredfold more meaningful.

In the following four pictures we will attempt to infuse such suggestiveness as shall cause the lessons of the preceding pages to lay a more commanding hold upon the heart, the mind, the will, that they may find new avenues for practical, every-day expression.

I. The Automobile

Doubtless no development of modern times is more illustrative of Christian living, in the union of the mystical and the practical, than the automobile. And it has become so ubiquitous, so thoroughly woven into the fabric of life, that its lessons, once we catch them, are inescapable.

We are planning to take a ride in our auto—so nearly a daily occurrence with the most of us. But we pause a moment to reflect upon its makeup. Why are we expecting it to take us upon our way? There is nothing outside of it to draw it. It is under no external compulsion. If it goes it is because of some inward urge. Yes, the auto is organized around an inner principle, namely, the expansive power of exploded gasoline. There it is, invisible, intangible, in its very heart and soul; everything visible, usable, practical, is gathered around, linked up with, made responsive to, this impelling principle.

Should this inner principle suddenly cease to exist, should the auto lose its inward secret of power, or should the mechanism become disconnected with the throbbing life within and the wheels refuse to revolve at its bidding—then, of what value is our auto? Were it to stand all the daylong at our door, motionless, inert, would we prize it for its other qualities? It is beautiful and graceful. It is strong and durable. Its paint is pleasing to the eye and lustrous. Its tires are expensive. Its upholstery is luxurious. Its every appointment is of the finest. Are we proud of it? Do we rejoice over it? Of course, it doesn't go; but, aside from that, it's such a splendid car!

Dear friends, we know full well that without the power to go, to do the thing for which it was made, cost what it may we must consider it but a pile of junk. Some time since there appeared in the papers a picture of a miniature auto, owned by a boy in Paris. It elicited much admiration, so perfect and complete, except for one thing—it had no engine. It was a plaything—nothing more. So is every Christian life that does not recognize the indwelling Spirit of God and link its outward mechanics for daily living to the dynamics of His inner working.

But now, we are ready for our ride. The chauffeur takes his seat, turns on the ignition, and the engine starts. It throbs with power and we are elated with the promise of a pleasing drive.

But, as we get under way and the chauffeur calls upon the engine to do its best, for some inexplicable reason he pulls back the emergency brake. What is he doing? He is acting insincerely. He is treating the engine unfairly. Professing to wish its finest service, he is refusing it freedom to render that service. With his foot he is asking it to go forward; with his hand he is hindering it from doing so.

Just so is every inconsistent Christian life. By faith in Christ we have dared to become Spirit-indwelt. We possess the inner working of His might and power. He is there, in us, to accomplish certain ends, to set us forward in things spiritual. Yet we cling to the “brake” of our fleshly, unresponsive self-life. We refuse Him freedom to achieve His ends. We actually work against Him. Is it fair?

Let us now label the picture, in the hope that the auto may henceforth speak to us its own deeply spiritual, possibly reproachful, lesson—so label it as to embody the mutuality of responsibility:

OUR RESPONDING TO HIS INWORKING

II. The Flower Garden

Returning from our ride we alight from the car and enter our front yard. As we do so we pass from public domain to privately owned property, the very transition that took place when we passed from being a man of the world to being a child of God. Henceforth we are not our own, having been bought with a price. Others have not acknowledged that ownership; we have. Of this distinction the Tabernacle, with its sacred enclosure, is a perfect portrayal. Entrance to the enclosure, and to our Father’s house, is by the Altar of Sacrifice, the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. All who there enter are His, by right of a purchase price. All outside are not. The court wall is the rightful, natural line of demarcation.

It is the spring time. Nature is bursting the bondage of winter. We conceive the desire for a flower garden, and forthwith we begin to plan for it. We select the spot, and recalling how greatly our neighbor’s flowers of last year were admired, we resolve to send away for the very best seed obtainable. We will have the finest, the most beautiful flowers it is possible to produce.

Then a difficulty confronts us. Our yard is open— open to the ingress of other folks’ chickens or cows, of prowling dogs and wallowing animals of whatsoever sort. Our efforts will be but wasted. What is the use of trying while these enemies of a flower garden have access to it, only to lay it in ruthless ruin? We see at once that our first move is to fence in, or hedge about, the land which is ours, that it may be ours in actuality, undisputed and undisturbed in the uses to which we desire to put it. So we set about to secure the separation of that which is our own from that which is not. It is our only wise course.

God, our Heavenly Father, has entered upon a like enterprise. He longs to produce gardens of Christian character, of surpassing beauty, to which the earth is otherwise stranger. What He is able to do He demonstrated, centuries ago, in the life of His own Son. Men have never ceased to admire its beauty; they speak of it still. But He would make a modern demonstration, that the men of our day may see, and wonder, and desire for themselves. In this He has made the start.

He already has the plots of ground. They are His, and they are widely scattered over the earth, where all conditions and races of men can see for themselves. And now, He will take His own heavenly seed—the Holy Spirit, holy, pure, beautiful—drop it into these bits of ground, and demonstrate the beauty of Heaven’s flowers in earthly soil.

Doubtless we have all seen, possibly we have visited, an experiment station or demonstration farm, such as the agricultural departments of our various states conduct, the purpose being scientifically to experiment with the different soils and climatic conditions, and thus to demonstrate for neighboring agriculturists what can be most advantageously produced in a given locality. The results have been amazing. In Alaska, where the writer resided for some years, the government demonstrated that grains, fruits, vegetables, could be produced, surpassing in abundance, size, and flavor, anything ever conceived for that supposedly nonproductive area. What the government has done, God wants to do, with even more surprising results, in us.

He asks for our lives as His Demonstration Gardens, in which to display His matchless power in character cultivation. But He is confronted with a difficulty, identical with that which we met in the making of our own garden. Realizing it would be a waste of seed and effort, resulting only in disappointment, were our plot left open to the desecration of vandal feet, we wisely refused to proceed until it was brought into a state of separation, set apart for our particular use. Then we found joy in bestowing our best effort.

Is our Father less wise than we? **“Be not deceived; God is not mocked.”** He knows when our lives are public property, the stamping ground for the world’s desecrating feet. He has no notion of bestowing His beautifying art until we do our part to provide some fence of separation, some mode of life that marks us as His, some “No Trespassing” sign to let the world know we are His.

How evident to every heart is the reasonableness of His expectation. What can He not do to beautify our garden plot when we meet the simple condition? Longing for Him to accept of our lives as a chosen spot for the display of His glory, here and now, we label this picture:

OUR SEPARATION IN ORDER TO HIS DEMONSTRATION.

III. Over the Fence

While we are still in the yard let us gather a lesson from looking over the fence into the field beyond.

Some years ago we saw a cartoon—memory says it was in *The Ram’s Horn*—which has never lost its suggestiveness. Near to a fence stood a donkey. Grown tired of his own grazing he had lifted his head and looked with envious eyes at the grass on yonder side. Persuaded that it was far better than his own pasture he was reaching his long neck over the fence in an effort to feed upon it. Meanwhile, another donkey, on the opposite side of the fence, obsessed with the same spirit of dissatisfaction with his own lot, was reaching over to avail himself of what he conceived to be the better pasture of his neighbor. And there were the two donkeys, each discontented with his own lot, each thinking the other’s lot the more desirable.

One does not need to be a donkey to fall into such foolish error. We see men and women making the same mistake, on all sides, under our very eyes. How easily done! Yet how ill-considered! Did you ever notice, in looking off at a distant hillside, how it appears to be completely covered with green verdure. But it is the deception of distance, lending enchantment. We walk over to the hillside and are surprised to find great bare spots in the midst of sparsely growing vegetation. No one of us is in position to truly judge the lot of another, so superficial is the view we necessarily take. Still less are we able to select a lot more wisely adapted to our need.

There is a story told of a man who became very much dissatisfied with his cross. One day he chanced upon a valley strewn with a great variety of crosses. He became elated with the thought that now he had opportunity to select a cross to his liking. So he laid his own down and, passing among them, lighted upon one bedecked with sparkling jewels.

“Ah,” he said, “this will suit me well; how grand to carry these jewels.” But he had not gone far until the cross became exceedingly heavy, and he was glad to return and lay it down. (How foolish to envy another his wealth). Looking about he espied another cross, all covered with roses. “How beautiful,” he thought; “this will just suit me.” Confidently he carried it away; but he had not gone far till the heat of the sun withered the roses and let the thorns press down into his shoulder. Disappointed, he again returned. This time he espied one that appealed to him, and said, “Surely this will suit me.” After carrying it for some distance, upon examining it more closely he was surprised to discover in it none other than his own discarded cross.

Who is it that has appointed our lot in life? Who is even now selecting and controlling the circumstances that He sees fit to weave into the forming of our character, for the rounding out of the chosen pattern of our lives? Is it not He who loved us, even unto Calvary? Is not our lot in life the outworking of “**the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will**”? Are we children of God, heirs of His riches, and living a merely fortuitous life? like the flotsam and jetsam washed about by the ocean wave?

Or dare we regard our lives as merely self-determined? “**We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them**” (Ephesians 2:10). Moreover, as we “**walk in them**” He walks in us (II Corinthians 6:16), even in the circumstances that seem so hard. His Spirit indwells us to guide us, to see that we do not miss the path, to enable us to fit into His appointment for us, to work in us a spirit of contentment therein. In proportion as we are responsive to the inworking of His mind and will, our lives are the expression of that mind and will.

Again, when we complain of our lot we are sinning against Him, against His love and wisdom for us. Were we allowing the blessed Spirit to work in us His own humility, we would acknowledge ourselves not wise enough to choose anything better than He is choosing for us, that we are far from deserving anything better than is being meted out to us. And how can we more fully prove ourselves undeserving of an altered lot than by complaining of what we now have? Rather than seizing upon our trying circumstances as the God-given opportunity for testing, strengthening, and stabilizing our faith?

When, however, we are found saying: “My Heavenly Father knows what is best for me; He will not suffer me to be tested above measure; whensoever He wills, He can change my circumstances; His will is always best”—then will He delight Himself in us and rejoice to bring release.

Having reflected thus upon the picture let us label it, as the earnest of our desire to find and fit into His perfect will for our lives:

OUR CONTENTMENT WITH HIS APPOINTMENT.

IV. In the House

We have had our ride, planned our flower garden, paused to learn a lesson from looking over the fence. We now pass on into the house.

We must recognize the house as particularly rich in suggestive lessons concerning the living of the Christian life. It is so used in Scripture. Is not the house the place where men live? And is not the Christian's heart the place where the Holy Spirit of God has chosen to live?

Since the writer of these pages has doubtless come to be associated in the mind of the readers with the better things of the spiritual life, may we venture to draw this picture in terms of a supposed call upon the reader in his or her own home. We come knocking at your door, seeking admission. You respond by graciously opening to us, inviting us in and ushering us to a seat. True, the seat is almost where we entered, but we are in, we are your guest. So is it with the Spirit. Admitted to every believer's life, though but barely in, He is in, an abiding Guest.

We seek to converse together. But the conversation lags. We seem to have so little of common interest. (We are supposing for the moment that you have not given yourself wholeheartedly to spiritual things). But, while we are thus engaged you espy a worldly friend of yours coming up the walk to call. You are embarrassed. You see your religious and worldly interests about to clash.

Without disclosing your motive you invite your preacher-friend to an inner room. This pleases me greatly, for am I not now further into your house? Yes; but as I examine my surroundings I am amazed to find myself in a tightly closed room, a virtual prisoner. Further in, it is true, but with less freedom and less promise of fellowship than before. And, to add to my discomfiture, my listening ear catches the sound of animated conversation between you and your worldly friend. No awkward pauses now; you are at home on ground of common familiarity. Reflecting upon my own efforts to converse, the contrast is painful.

Dear reader, have you ever considered that my experience in your home is identical with that of the Spirit in your heart? You have Him; but He does not have you. The really vital concerns of your heart-life you have kept for things apart from Him, for things which He could not share. Then you complain that spiritual things do not command you, that they fail to interest you.

During a travelling ministry it was our frequent lot to be entertained in the homes of the people.

The entertainment which we most appreciated was that which accorded us free range of the house, unhampered by restraint, nothing concealed, nothing held back. It was such freedom that formed the basis for a satisfying fellowship. The Holy Spirit looks for the same in our lives, the opportunity for making His presence tell in the molding of our lives.

How many housewives have a “lumber room,” a catchall, a rubbish room is what it amounts to, made up of an assortment of things they would be ashamed to show their visitors, yet which they lack the courage to throw away and be rid of forever. They would blush to have their neighbors peep into that room and investigate its contents.

That cluttered-up, unyielded, uncleansed room is but a picture of what the average Christian is harboring in his inner heart-life—things he would not have anyone suspect are there; things the presence of which he is scarcely willing to acknowledge to himself; things that if brought out to public gaze would shame him forever with his fellows. Yet the Holy Spirit knows these things are there, and has to put up with them daily. He knows they remain in the life, solely because the one who has let Him into the heart has refused to turn that heart over to Him for His full occupancy, undisputed and unrestrained.

Friends of the writer tell this experience: They were at one time under necessity of changing their residence. At length they found a house that suited them well. They were ready to decide upon it. But they thought best to inspect it once more.

In doing so they came upon a door which had previously escaped their attention. To their inquiry the agent explained, what he had before neglected to tell them, that the owner had some things he wished to store and that he was reserving that room for his own use.

“Oh,” said our friends, “if that is the case we would not even consider taking the house. We want it entirely for ourselves or not at all.”

Of course. Not one of us would hesitate in coming to a like decision. Then how can we ask the Holy Spirit to accept of a divided heart, unsundered in its entirety to His blessed presence?

Let us label this picture, with prayerful desire that He will accept the offering and fill and flood it with His Shekinah glory:

OUR YIELDING TO HIS INDWELLING

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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